



Courtesy photo
Leaders from Laredo Community College and the Webb County Commissioners Court met recently to explore the possibility of entering into a partnership relating to issues dealing with economic development and quality of life amenities. Among those present were, from left, LCC chief development officer Blas Castañeda, college president Dr. Ramon H. Dovalina, county commissioners Frank Sciaraffa and Jerry Garza and LCC continuing education director Steve Mon Dragon.

City to seize property for El Portal

By CLAY REDDICK
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The Laredo City Council is moving ahead with plans to seize downtown land for El Portal, the major improvement project at International Bridge I.

Without discussion, the council approved clarification of a resolution approved in 2004 declaring the city's intention to buy or condemn a parcel of land owned by Luis Montañó Jr. and his brothers.

The land is in the path of a planned pedestrian plaza for El Portal.

The original resolution did not include the names of streets involved or why it's a public necessity to condemn the property. Monday's clarification gave the specific location and stated that the city needs the Montañó property to ensure there is wheelchair access to the plaza.

City Manager Larry Dovalina said the city has tried to negotiate with the family, but that recently

an appraiser was denied entry to the property, which the Montañós rent.

None of the landowners addressed the council Monday, but Luis Montañó has previously vowed to fight city efforts to take the land.

In other business Monday, Mayor Betty Flores elaborated on her dealings with Michael Chertoff, director of the Department of Homeland Security, regarding border security.

The mayor, who said she was the first city mayor to meet with Chertoff, said the director is against a border wall plan supported by Congress.

On his recent visit to Laredo, Chertoff said he supports a "virtual fence," explaining that a physical fence wouldn't make sense along the entire border.

Flores also said she has seen samples of the crossing cards that have been proposed for people reentering the country.

Councilman John Galo said the crossing card is an unaccept-

able proposal that would hurt bridge traffic.

"It's going to kill commerce in Laredo and all across the border," Galo said.

The mayor said any resolution on border security should include language protecting commerce.

Flores said the city has put much effort into securing the border, and she will ask the state and federal governments to match what the city has spent on security.

"It hasn't been about a hand-out; it's been about putting us on an even keel," Flores said.

In other city business the council also:

- tabled a resolution awarding a contract on the Tanquesitos 1 wastewater collection and water distribution improvements project

- adopted its federal legislative agenda

- recognized a federal grant that pays for the renovation of the Plaza Theater marquee and blade sign

- created a full-time community service aide position to work with the HIV/AIDS prevention program

- recognized the city's December 2005 employee of the month, Manuel Reyes of the Community Development Department

- recognized 11 city employees who have returned from military service in Iraq after being deployed a year

- recognized the Laredo Community College Palomino Men's Tennis Team for winning the National Junior College Athletic Association title last year

- recognized seven local athletes ranked in the U.S. Tennis Association's 5.5 seniors category

- recognized the Treviño family for being named Texas Tennis Family of the Year

- recognized the winners of the Mayor's Cup softball tournament for city employees

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